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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: NINEWA: IHEC SAYS IDP VOTING MAY CAUSE PROBLEMS

Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford. Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

11. (C) Summary: The Ninewa Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) representative, Abdel Khaleq al-Dabbagh, said he foresees Election Day complications, including possible voting disruptions, due to unresolved issues surrounding Ninewa IDPs who now reside in the KRG. Dabbagh claimed that Ninewa IDPs currently living in the KRG could, in theory, vote in both KRG IDP voting centers and their regular voting centers in Ninewa. Dabbagh explained also that tens of thousands of IDPs in the KRG will not be able to vote because they did not register in time. Dabbagh said that he feared many of these Saddam-era IDPs would show up at Ninewa voting stations on election day and correctly be refused an opportunity to vote because their names are not on the voters list, possibly leading to violent confrontations. Dabbagh feared the Kurdish parties may use this problem to discredit elections. Dabbagh also detailed the IHEC's procedures for dealing with complaints of voter intimidation and its plan for voter education. End summary.

IDP VOTING

12. (C) On January 8, PMIN Ford met with the Governorate Electoral Officer (GEO) Dabbagh to discuss election preparations in Ninewa. Dabbagh said there were two outstanding issues related to IDP voting. First, Dabbagh said that there were 298,000 IDPs who theoretically could vote in both Ninewa and the KRG at IDP voting centers. (Note: There are, however, a number of safeguards that would prevent double voting, including a province-wide curfew and the placing of indelible ink on the voters' fingers.) According to Dabbagh, IDPs who fled to the KRG from Ninewa, and subsequently registered with the Ministry of Migration and Displaces Persons were added to the voters roll at IDP voting centers in the KRG. Dabbagh also said that some of those IDPs still have ration (Public Distribution System - PDS) cards that list them as Ninewa residents. The voters roll in Ninewa is compiled from the PDS records of the Ministry of Trade. According to Dabbagh, the two government agencies have not coordinated to eliminate instances of the same person appearing on voter's rolls at two voting stations.

13. (C) Dabbagh brought up a second IDP issue that he feared would lead to complications on Election Day. During Saddam Hussein's reign nearly 120,000 families were forcibly removed from Ninewa to Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah in the KRG, according to Dabbagh. Dabbagh said that many of those who were displaced by Saddam want to return to Ninewa to vote but had not registered last year. (Note: In addition, the 120,000 families could not register with the Ministry of Migration because they were displaced before 2003. On December 18, 2008 the Kurdish-controlled Ninewa Provincial Council voted on a resolution to delay elections until an

accommodation could be made for the 120,000 families to vote.

That resolution has been ignored by election authorities.) Dabbagh said that he feared many of the Saddam-era IDPs would show up at voting stations on election day and correctly be refused an opportunity to vote because their names are not on the voters list, possibly leading to violent confrontations. Moreover, Dabbagh argued, Kurdish parties could use media images of voters being turned away from polling places as a way to discredit elections. PMIN pointed out to Dabbagh that Qway to discredit elections. PMIN pointed out to Dabbagh that it is important for IHEC to take the initiative to ensure that ineligible voters do not vote on Election Day. The utility of election lists was to ensure only those who register can vote. He said the IHEC could update the lists after the provincial election.

VOTER INTIMIDATION

¶4. (C) Dabbagh explained that his office passes reports of violence against candidates to the police and security services. The GEO could do little else as it does not have investigative or law enforcement authority, Dabbagh said. If the local security authorities determine that a local political entity engaged in serious, illegal pressure against a competing political entity, Dabbagh is to forward the file to IHEC in Baghdad for final adjudication. So far he has not forwarded any such cases. Dabbagh said that his office had so far received a few complaints of unidentified individuals tearing down election posters. Dabbagh said that all the political entities had been made aware of the penalties of such actions. Dabbagh added that it was difficult to

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prosecute such cases, however, because in many cases political parties pay children to tear down elections posters. (The parties cynically think the police will not arrest children who engage in this illegal behavior, he claimed.) PMIN urged Dabbagh to ensure political party complaints are received expeditiously and that local security authorities study them seriously too.

VOTER EDUCATION

¶5. (C) According to Dabbagh, the IHEC had allocated IRD 125 million to conduct voter education, including election-related Public Service Announcements (PSAs). Dabbagh said that the IHEC plans to run PSAs during the last two weeks preceding elections. Explaining the new ballot would be a priority for the IHEC in its voter outreach efforts, according to Dabbagh.

¶6. (C) Comment: Dabbagh is generally considered an honest broker by most political actors in the province. As such, his concerns about IDP voting becoming a problem on Election Day should be taken seriously. Dabbagh's role as a regional implementer, however, prevents him from taking the necessary corrective steps at the policy level. Closing the provincial borders should at least reduce the number of Kurdish IDPs who might think of voting once in Dohuk or Erbil and then voting again in Ninewa. (The inked fingers should also help, although there is a cottage industry in Iraq advising how to get the ink off expeditiously.) The issue of the Kurdish IDPs who never registered at all is a different one that merits more attention from both IHEC and the Kurdish political parties in advance of the next elections to be held, in theory, in counties and municipalities in summer ¶2009.

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